

Project 2025 Messaging Survey

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Center for American Progress, Accountable.US, and Upswing Research
DATE: June 27, 2024

A recent survey¹ conducted on behalf of the Center for American Progress and Accountable.US shows authoritarian vulnerabilities in Project 2025 offer a strong messaging avenue to weaken the policy goals of the far-right.

Concern over Project 2025 centers on two main tenets: (1) the plan guts checks and balances, and (2) it concentrates power in the Oval Office similarly to how other authoritarian leaders have over the years in other countries.

Few Americans have any meaningful knowledge about Project 2025, and an unbiased introduction that identifies it as a conservative think tank's brainchild fails to turn Americans against the policies in the plan. A carefully planned strategy allows us to introduce Americans to Project 2025 in a way that elevates a *new* threat. This also suggests there are only opportunities to use Project 2025 if progressives define it. We aren't preparing for Project 2025, we are exposing it and defeating it by making the American people aware of what's at stake. And we don't have time to waste.

Notably, while a vast majority of Americans oppose Project 2025's anti-worker and anti-middle class economic policies, these policies do not trump concerns over the plan's authoritarian elements. While there is opposition, the economic arguments echo discussions progressives and conservatives have been making for decades. The authoritarian aspect of Project 2025 is new information and has the potential to break through *and* persuade people against the plan. In addition, the authoritarian proposals are well suited to policy-focused communications.

The policies in Project 2025 are unpopular, but many Americans doubt these ideas will become law. Framing Project 2025 as the plan to gut our checks and balances and enact the MAGA agenda raises the stakes and elicits deep concern. This frame is strong alone and is essential when addressing any of the issues addressed in Project 2025: taxes, overtime pay, reproductive freedoms, education and head start, healthcare and preexisting conditions, and more.

Messages that centered on the language of far-right Christian nationalism and the backgrounds of the authors and donors of Project 2025 were among the weakest we tested in moving people across demographics against the plan. The erosion of personal liberties is a stronger frame to address the policies we typically associate with Christian nationalism. This indicates the limits of other novel frames in taking down the far-right's policy agenda.

Takeaways and Recommendations

¹ Upswing Research & Strategy conducted a survey among 1,200 likely 2024 voters nationwide from May 15 – 19, 2024. We interviewed 1,000 likely voters nationwide with established quotas across demographic, partisan, and geographic variables to ensure the survey is representative of likely voters. We also conducted 100 additional interviews for Black and Hispanic voters. The confidence interval overall is +/- 3.1% (+/- 6.61% among Black voters and 6.91% among Hispanic voters); the interval is higher among subgroups.

The strongest arguments about Project 2025 are gutting checks and balances and consolidating power in the Oval Office like other authoritarian governments. The economic arguments are important but are not as galvanizing, and these positions simply do not elicit the same backlash as the authoritarian threat when people are forced to choose. Furthermore, there is less information available to Americans explaining the authoritarian threat as opposed to the same-old conservative economic policies throughout the Project 2025 agenda. We have an opportunity to focus on how this is a power grab that mirrors other authoritarian governments by **gutting checks and balances**. We must make that clear to Americans and use the specific policies in their manifesto as proof points to support it.

- **Center the authoritarian argument on gutting checks and balances.** We need a succinct argument that illustrates what Project 2025 does; explaining that it guts checks and balances is concise, easy to understand, and explains *how* Project 2025 can accomplish things Americans think the Constitution makes impossible. This argument gets at the core of American democracy, meaning everyone will understand why it is bad.
- **The economic policies are broadly opposed, but it is the anti-democratic arguments that come through in this survey.** The economic policies in Project 2025 engender the broadest opposition, particularly those that could have direct impacts on Americans. Still, these arguments do not come through in the survey in the same way the authoritarian arguments do. The authoritarian arguments repeatedly soar above other concerns in three different types of survey methods after people hear thematic descriptions of Project 2025.
- **While the policies drive most of the movement and concern against Project 2025, thematic frames help focus Americans.** Positive impressions of Project 2025 collapsed after hearing about its specific policy goals, but their organic impressions of it are vague and ideological. It is not until after the thematic descriptions that Americans offer more specific concerns. This is where the real devilry of Project 2025 comes into view.
- **Don't make it partisan or ideological.** Messages hinting at typical conservative ideology just don't work as well (see the thematic paragraphs Christian Nationalism and Hacks in Appendix D). They push Republicans and Republican-leaning independents to their corners. Authoritarian arguments set up a permission structure to get Americans, particularly those who dislike politicians from both parties, to move.
- **Use examples, but shy away from those Americans might dismiss, like Hitler.** Showing how Project 2025's goals compare to other dictators and authoritarians is resonant, but we must be careful not to go over the top. If we use over-the-top imagery and excessive comparisons to the Nazis as a reference, the people we need to reach will tune it out. Plain arguments which rely on examples from multiple authoritarian leaders are effective. Additional content testing and research recommend that when it comes to other far-right policies, specifically on reproductive rights and the economy, it is effective to show that the far-right has put these policies in place when given the chance at the state level.
- **Articulating the threat to our system of checks and balances may make Project 2025's unpopular policy proposals more threatening.** Our system of checks and balances resonates deeply with the public and provides a level of psychological safety for Americans who believe these checks will moderate or block extreme policy proposals. By illustrating how Project 2025 seeks to concentrate power in the Oval Office and undermine democratic safeguards, the

more extreme economic and social policies favored by the far-right become less theoretical. Americans desire a balance of power, and illustrating this new authoritarian approach to governing makes the potential impacts of Project 2025's policies tangible and urgent. This also, critically, provides forward-looking proof of the far-right's threat to our Democracy.

Project 2025, and Those Behind It, Are Essentially Unknown

Americans show little recognition of Project 2025 and the organizations and individuals behind the effort. While 74% claim familiarity with the Heritage Foundation, only 44% offer an opinion on the group (26%-18% favorable-unfavorable). Stephen Miller and Charles Koch are underwater among those who can rate them, while Leonard Leo is unknown. Just 28% can rate Project 2025 (13%-15% favorable-unfavorable), and when asked specifically about how much they have heard about the project, only 12% say they know a great deal/a lot about Project 2025.

Americans' views shift favorably after a straight description of the project (text included in appendix), moving to 46%-38% favorable-unfavorable. Notable movement after information includes:

- Democrats remain skeptical of the project, but Republicans move strongly in favor of the initiative. Independent men also find it appealing.
- Americans under age 50 respond positively to the initial description of Project 2025, while Americans over age 50 are more split.
- Black Americans largely reject Project 2025, while Hispanic Americans are initially evenly divided.

Table 1: Initial and Informed Views of Project 2025

Project 2025 Favorability	Initial	Informed
Total	13 – 15	46 – 38
Democrats	16 – 21	21 – 68
Independent Men	12 – 15	42 – 32
Independent Women	10 – 12	31 – 45
Republicans	12 – 11	78 – 7
Under 50	21 – 17	51 – 34
Over 50	7 – 14	42 – 40
Seniors	6 – 15	38 – 44
White College Men	10 – 15	52 – 35
White College Women	10 – 17	37 – 48
White Non-College Men	10 – 14	57 – 22
White Non-College Women	12 – 14	49 – 33
White	11 – 15	50 – 34

Black	22 – 14	28 – 53
Hispanic	17 – 15	42 – 43

Project 2025 Policies See Broad Opposition

After hearing more information about Project 2025, Americans turn sharply against the plan, heavily opposing proposals in economic, social/cultural, and government administration. At least two-thirds of Americans oppose all the economic policies tested. Policies with the broadest impact on people generate near universal opposition: allowing employers to stop paying overtime (92% oppose), increasing taxes for middle-class families (91% oppose), and placing a new tax on employer-sponsored health insurance (88% oppose).

Attacks on personal rights and equality also evoke strong opposition. More than 8-in-10 Americans oppose a national ban on abortion and IVF (83% oppose), restrictions on birth control and Plan B (82% oppose) and allowing the CDC to increase surveillance of abortion practices (82% oppose). Broad opposition to ending requirements for hospitals to provide abortions (75% oppose) and criminalizing abortion pills (68% oppose) also exists.

There is strong opposition to defunding K-12 and early childhood education, particularly among Black Americans (80% oppose). More than three-quarters of Americans oppose making it legal to discriminate against LGBTQ individuals, as well as 66% oppose allowing adoption agencies to discriminate against same-sex couples.

Project 2025's proposals to gut the government's system of checks and balances also draw wide opposition, while views of its foreign policy proposals are more divided. Fully 79% of Americans oppose allowing Presidents to replace civil servants with political loyalists, and 77% oppose ending the independence of agencies like the FBI and the Department of Justice.

Notably, however, Americans express support for some of the more nefarious populist policies that the MAGA movement has championed. Americans favor national voter ID laws (77% favor) and mass deportations of immigrants who are in the country illegally (60% favor).

Favorability of Project 2025 craters to 25%-66% favorable-unfavorable once Americans learn about the specific policies in this completely one-sided messaging environment. Democrats and independent women grow even more unfavorable toward the initiative, while the plan moves to a net negative among independent men. Even Republicans are split once they hear the specific policies.

Table 2: Project 2025 Favorability Post-Policy Information

Project 2025 Favorability	Initial	Informed	Post – Policy
Total	13 – 15	46 – 38	25 – 66
Democrats	16 – 21	21 – 68	13 – 85
Independent Men	12 – 15	42 – 32	30 – 57
Independent Women	10 – 12	31 – 45	8 – 83
Republicans	12 – 11	78 – 7	39 – 47

Under 50	21 – 17	51 – 34	31 – 59
Over 50	7 – 14	42 – 40	19 – 73
Seniors	6 – 15	38 – 44	17 – 76
White College Men	10 – 15	52 – 35	34 – 58
White College Women	10 – 17	37 – 48	13 – 78
White Non-College Men	10 – 14	57 – 22	36 – 54
White Non-College Women	12 – 14	49 – 33	18 – 72
White	11 – 15	50 – 34	25 – 65
Black	22 – 14	28 – 53	20 – 75
Hispanic	17 – 15	42 – 43	21 – 70

Importantly, Americans only offer rather bland impressions of Project 2025 after just hearing about these policies without any context. They regurgitate some policies and offer vague statements about Project 2025 being bad for democracy and the middle class, but they fail to synthesize the information. When asked to describe the project in one word, they again offer vague or partisan assessments like conservative, horrible, and bad. This means we will have to put this information into context for them; we can't just offer the policies and expect Americans to push back on their own.

Messaging Sharpens Concerns over Project 2025

While the proposed policies themselves make Americans more negative toward Project 2025, thematic narratives help develop a greater depth of negative impressions than the standalone policies. Americans see several framing messages on Project 2025 as concerning. The top frames center on providing giveaways to powerful corporate interests at the expense of the middle class, eroding personal liberties and ending the independence of agencies that hold government accountable, and weakening systems of checks and balances.

Americans express less concern around frames that focus on specific ideologies or hint at partisan platforms. This includes putting the proposals into conservative, Christian nationalism, or more conservative-sounding buckets.

Views on Project 2025 remain static after the series of thematic messages, 29%-61% favorable-unfavorable. Most of the movement comes from backlash among Republicans, perhaps a reaction to some of the more ideologically focused arguments. However, we believe the policies pushed impressions down essentially to Project 2025's nadir leaving little room to fall after hearing messaging and context.

When we asked respondents open-ended questions, the power of messaging around thematics, not just listing specific policies, came through. Themes help to bring concerns into sharper focus than after hearing about the Project 2025 policies individually. Americans identify the project as “scary,” “terrifying,” “crazy,” or as aiming to create dictatorships or end democracy. **These responses are much more developed than those immediately following just a straight reading of the policies in Project 2025.**

A plurality of Americans (31%) point to the plan’s attempts to gut checks and balances and allow a presidential power grab (without partisan association) as the best description of Project 2025. This description resonates above corporate corruption, a strong conservative movement, or Christian nationalism.

Figure 1: Project 2025 Open-Ended Impressions

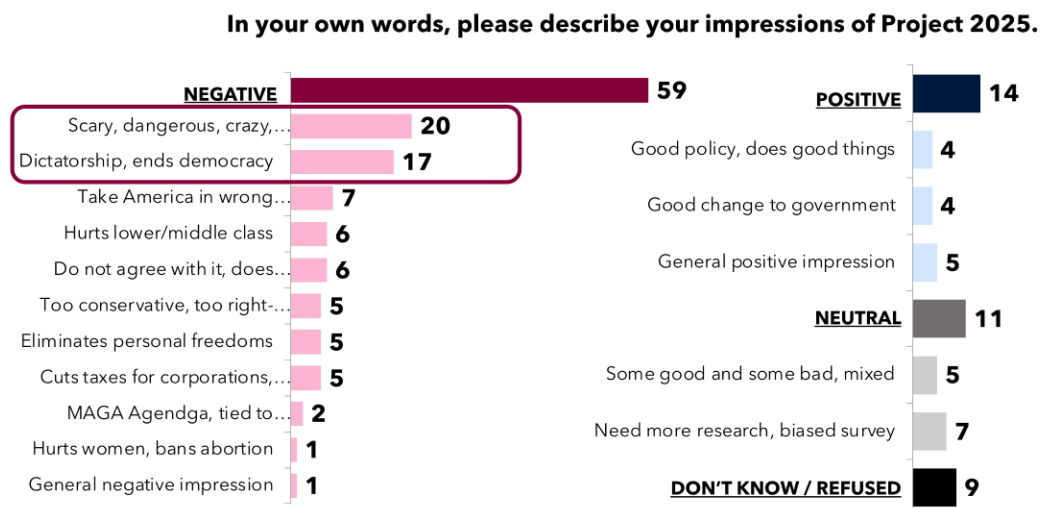


Figure 2: Forced Choice Project 2025 Descriptions

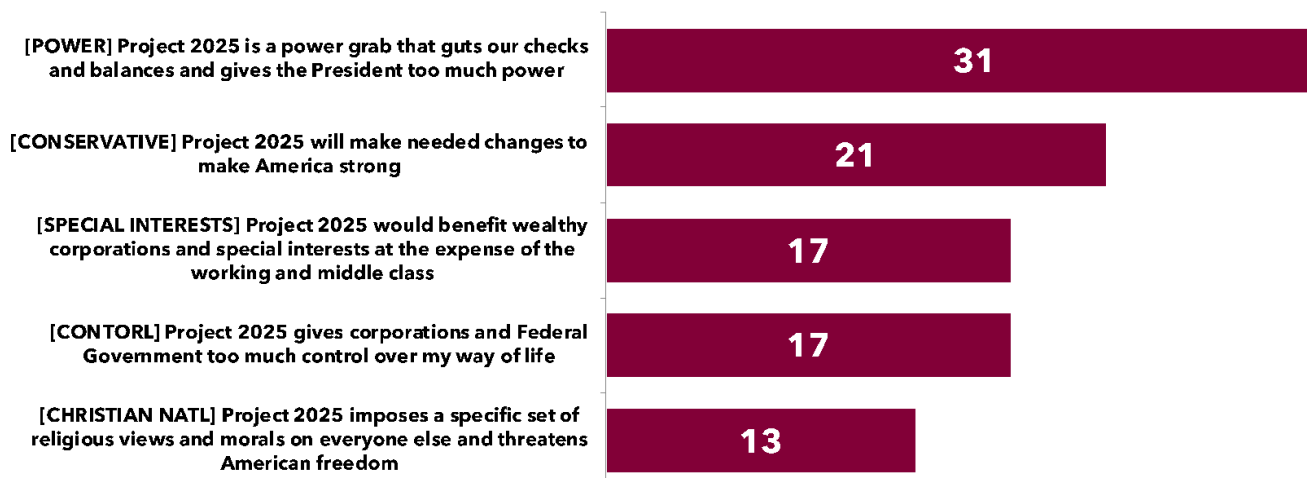


Table 3: Forced Choice Descriptions By Select Demographics

Best Describes Project 2025	Total	Under 50	Black	Hispanic	Ind Women
Power	31	27	38	28	35
Conservative	21	24	8	18	8
Control	17	18	21	19	22

Special Interests	17	15	20	19	17
Christian Nationalism	13	16	13	16	19

Americans also believe that Project 2025 gives the government too much control over people’s lives:

- Seven-in-ten agree that “Project 2025 takes away my freedom because it lets the government and corporations have too much control over my way of life and ability to make my own decisions” over “Project 2025 would give me more freedom because it reduces government intrusion on me and the economy” (30%).

Finally, asking respondents to repeatedly rank their concerns in a MaxDiff analysis of the thematic message reveals authoritarianism, gutting checks and balances, and an Oval Office power grab strike the most fear about Project 2025 when compared to other themes, with economic messages being less salient. This is particularly true among subgroups.

Figure 3: Project 2025 Worries - MaxDiff

Please indicate which one WORRIES YOU THE MOST ABOUT THE PROJECT 2025 and which one WORRIES YOU THE LEAST ABOUT PROJECT 2025.

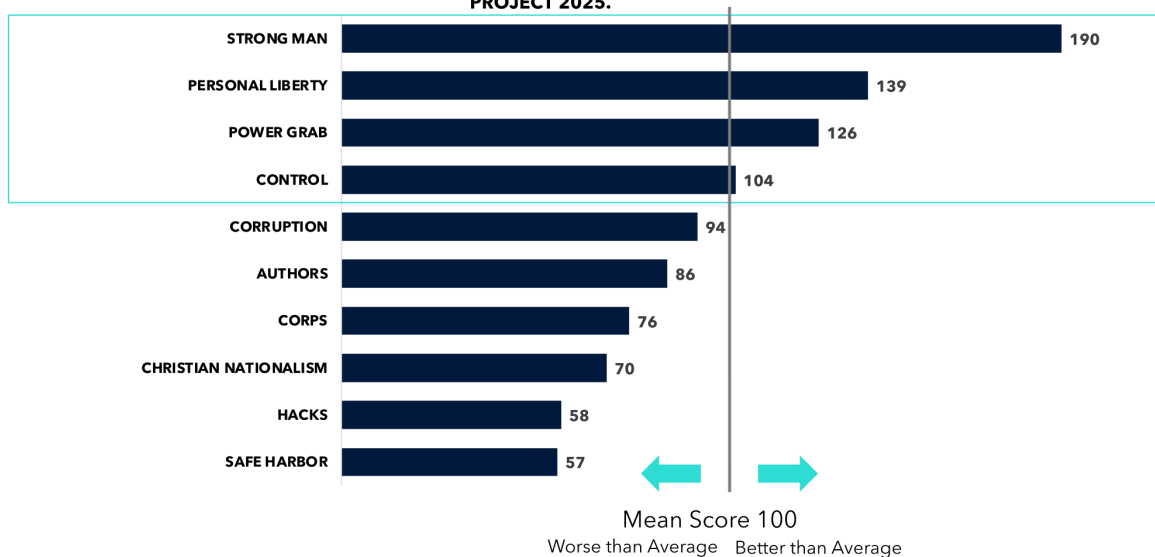


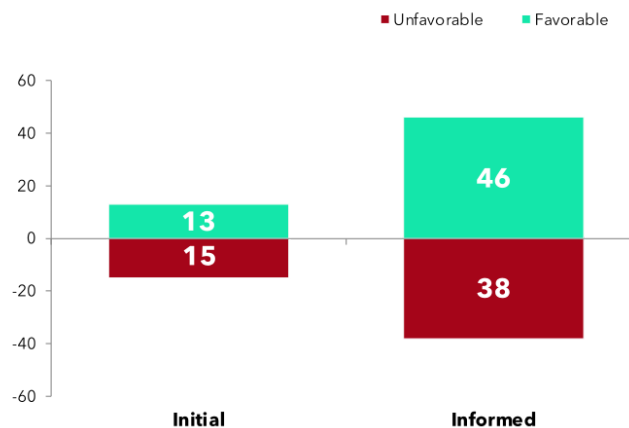
Figure 4: MaxDiff By Targeted Groups

Average	Total	Under 50	Black	Hispanic	Ind Women	Double Haters
STRONG MAN	190	176	177	185	207	214
PERSONAL LIBERTY	139	130	121	136	166	168
POWER GRAB	126	108	151	107	132	116
CONTROL	104	105	106	96	98	97
CORRUPTION	93	102	77	90	89	71
AUTHORS	86	88	113	107	66	68
CORPS	76	78	79	70	68	71
CHRIST. NATL.	70	87	66	79	63	78
HACKS	58	65	60	73	63	61
SAFE HARBOR	57	61	50	55	47	56

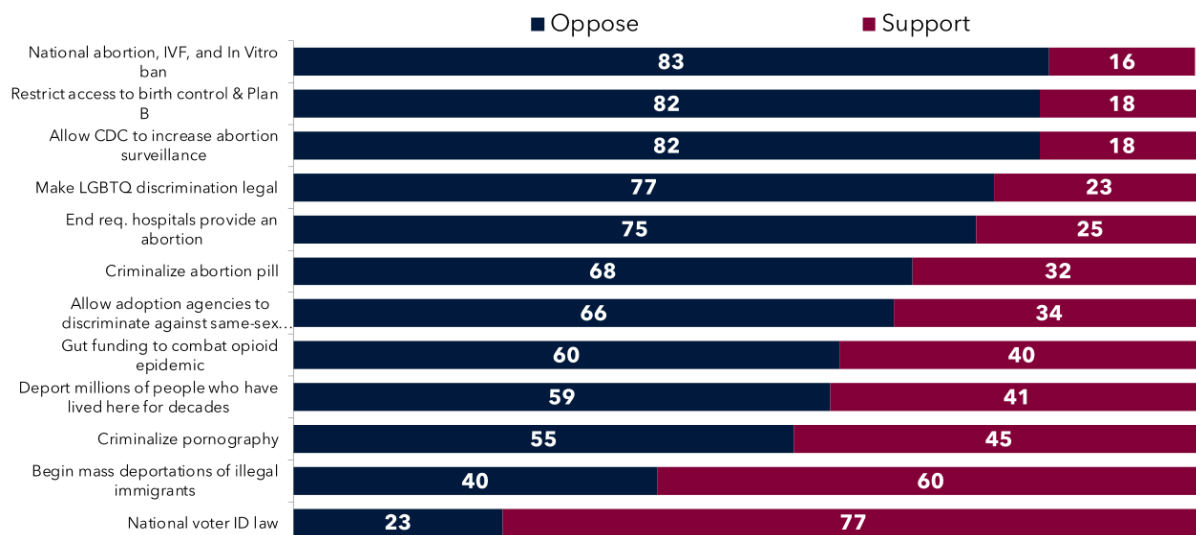
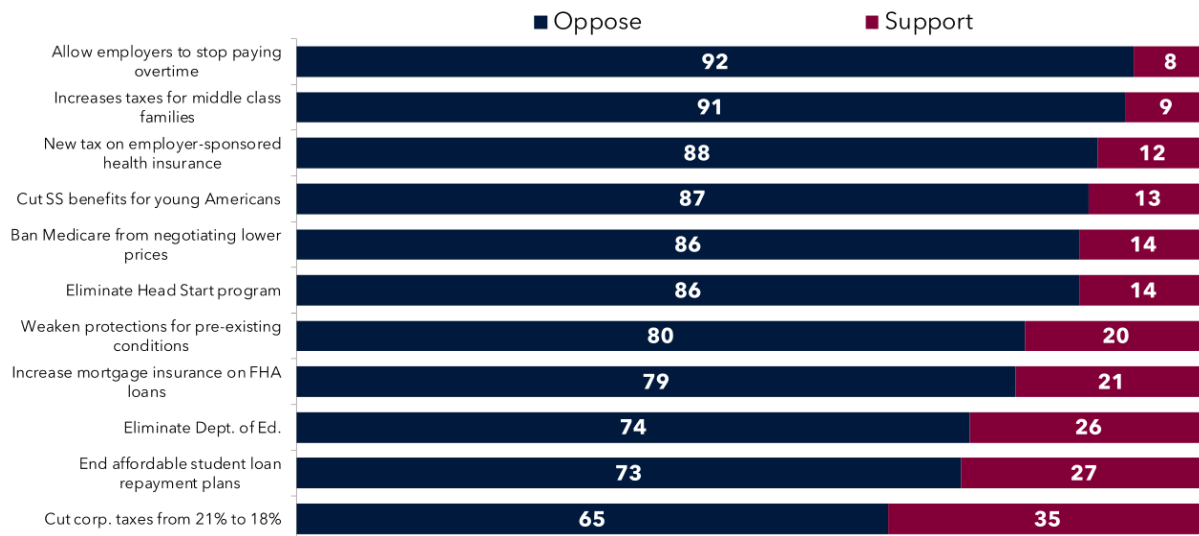
Appendix

Appendix A: Positive Project 2025 Paragraph

Project 2025 is led by former Trump Administration officials and the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank. They have assembled a collection of policy proposals that will reshape the executive branch of American government in the next conservative presidency. These policies number in the hundreds and are the collective work of 400 scholars and policy experts from across the conservative movement and around the country. Contributors include former elected officials, world-renowned economists, and veterans from four presidential Administrations. The Heritage foundation has written similar policy plans in the past, and previous conservative administrations have passed many of the proposed ideas. The project is the effort of a broad coalition of conservative organizations that have come together to ensure a successful administration begins in January 2025.



Appendix B & C: Most Opposed Project 2025 Policies



Appendix D: Full Text of Negative Messaging

Negative Messaging on Project 2025

(CORPS) Project 2025 would be a giveaway to big corporations and the wealthy over regular people. The plan would go even further than the Trump administration tax bill from 2017 by slashing corporate taxes another \$500 billion. The plan eliminates overtime pay for workers as we know it, adds a new tax on health care premiums, and raises taxes on middle-class Americans. It protects big corporations that price gouge on everything from groceries to gas to prescription drugs and gives corporations more control to write their own rules.

(CORRUPTION) Project 2025 is funded by over \$50 million from Leonard Leo's dark money network and other powerful corporate special interests. Special interest lobbyists dictated entire sections cutting taxes on big corporations and raising them on working- and middle-class Americans. They propose new rules that would allow their corporate clients to squeeze even more profit from middle-class Americans without any accountability. Investigative reporters uncovered that these corporate interests have already written executive orders to protect Big Oil in the next conservative administration.

(CONTROL) Project 2025 proposes some of the largest changes to the federal government since the nation's founding, giving sweeping control over Americans' lives to corporations and politicians. Their plan changes hundreds of rules overnight, gives corporations the power to harm workers and pollute our drinking water without being held accountable, and uses the tools of government to interfere in our lives by banning abortion, limiting access to birth control, and controlling what can be taught in local schools.

(PERSONAL LIBERTY) Project 2025's policy proposals will erode personal fundamental freedoms for each and every American. The plan eliminates the independence of the Department of Justice and law enforcement and allows the President to direct specific prosecutions and investigations. Project 2025 also explicitly illustrates a surveillance state to monitor which women get abortions, what is taught in local schools, and what books kids have access to.

(POWER GRAB) Project 2025 consolidates power in the presidency by gutting the checks and balances at the core of American democracy and weakening the independence of federal agencies. The plan calls for firing thousands of federal civil servants who are loyal to the public and replacing them with far-right loyalists, who would use the government to benefit themselves and target political opponents. Their proposals will make it easier for government officials to break the law without any safeguards and to target citizens they disagree with.

(SAFE HARBOR) Project 2025 will destabilize the American economy and scare away billions in investments that make us the biggest economy in the world. Their plan eliminates the independence of regulatory and consumer protection agencies that give business confidence in our economy, like the Federal Trade Commission and Securities and Exchange Commission. Replacing a predictable rule of law with more power for politicians would weaken our economic power on the world stage. The value of the dollar will decline, jobs will disappear, trade will diminish, and Americans' income and quality of life will decline.

(STRONG MAN) The restructuring of government that Project 2025 lays out is similar to the playbook dictators and authoritarian governments have used repeatedly over the last century. The groups behind Project 2025 have borrowed policies from Viktor Orbán, the authoritarian leader in Hungary. They would restructure the Department of Justice so the President can prosecute political opponents and create the reason later, like the Soviets did during the Cold War and Putin does today in Russia.

(HACKS) Project 2025 is already screening job applicants for an incoming presidential administration. It contains litmus test questions to ensure anyone hired will be a "conservative warrior" who is loyal to their political ideology regardless of training or expertise. The plan would replace non-partisan civil servants like scientists, intelligence and national security officers, law enforcement officials, and doctors who can provide advice free from politics with political appointees who have no specialized training, harming our safety in exchange for political loyalty.

(CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM) Project 2025 has hundreds of policies that bring us closer to Christian nationalism, imposing one rigid religious view on all Americans. The plan would ban abortions nationwide with no exceptions for rape or the life of the mother, punish LGBT Americans, criminalize behavior they consider anti-Christian, and some backers would ban no-fault divorce to keep people in marriages, even if there's violence, and require "Sabbath pay" for working on Sundays.

(AUTHORS) Major contributors to Project 2025 include former Trump Administration officials like Stephen Miller, religious fundamentalists, designated hate groups, and climate deniers. These authors include people who worked to overturn the results of the 2020 election, led the campaign to install far-right justices on the Supreme Court to eliminate the right to abortion, and have advocated for fringe views from using the military to stop peaceful protests to banning no-fault divorce.

Appendix E: Full Text of Negative Messaging for MaxDiff

Negative Messaging on Project 2025

(CORPS) Project 2025 would be a giveaway to big corporations and the wealthy over regular people.

(CORRUPTION) Project 2025 is funded by a dark money network and other powerful corporate special interests that are dictating entire sections of the plan.

(CONTROL) Project 2025 proposes some of the largest changes to the federal government since the nation's founding, giving sweeping control over Americans' lives to corporations and politicians.

(PERSONAL LIBERTY) Project 2025's policy proposals will erode personal fundamental freedoms for each and every American.

(POWER GRAB) Project 2025 consolidates power in the presidency by gutting the checks and balances at the core of American democracy and weakening the independence of federal agencies.

(SAFE HARBOR) Project 2025 will destabilize the American economy and scare away billions in investments that make us the biggest economy in the world.

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